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Streetscapes [Dialogue]

Heinz Emigholz

Producer Frieder Schlaich, Irene von Alberti. **Production company** Filmgalerie 451 (Berlin, Germany). **Director** Heinz Emigholz. **Screenplay** Heinz Emigholz, Zohar Rubinstein. **Director of photography** Heinz Emigholz, Till Beckmann. **Editor** Heinz Emigholz, Till Beckmann. **Sound design** Christian Obermaier, Jochen Jezussek. **Sound** Rafael Álvarez, Rainer Gerlach, Markus Ruff.
With John Erdman, Jonathan Perel, Natja Brunckhorst.

Colour. 132 min. English.

Premiere February 13, 2017, Berlinale Forum

A film director confides in his interlocutor. He talks about the working process, about creative blocks, about artistic crises and expressive forces. At some point, the idea takes hold that this conversation could be turned into a film. And this is the very film we're watching the two of them in.

The screenplay for the feature *Streetscapes [Dialogue]* focuses on the essential questions of filmmaking and is based on a five-day analytical marathon that Heinz Emigholz undertook with trauma specialist Zohar Rubinstein. Their re-enacted exchange becomes the key not only to the Streetscapes series, but also to the director's entire oeuvre, which is largely dedicated to the experience of architecture.

In and around buildings by Julio Vilamajó, Eladio Dieste and finally Arno Brandhuber, John Erdman plays the director and Jonathan Perel the analyst. They discuss breakdowns, breakthroughs and the mediating effect of the camera, they sift through the artist's childhood for clues. The architectonic backdrops ensure that the subject is always present. In this playful film, Emigholz achieves something his work has long sought to do: to give equal weighting to both foreground and background.

Christoph Terhechte

Trauma and architecture

There are streets, paths, motorways, alleys, boulevards and promenades. And there are life paths, intersections and dead ends. Two men sit on the shady raised platform of a brick building somewhere in Montevideo. They are submerged in a conversational marathon that never ceases throughout the entire film. The younger of the two is an analyst; the older man his analysand. Their nationalities are unclear; they speak a simple, internationally understandable English. They talk about a childhood among the ruins and the traumatised people of Germany shortly after the Second World War, about fleeing, about an obsessive interest in architecture and about manic writing. And they speak about work with the film camera, which is a technical instrument for the young analyst, but a lifeline for the old film director. The starting point of the six-day marathon is the psychological and physical block that prevents the director from starting a last great film, the Streetscapes saga. The conversation, which in a slow process dissolves the director's block, takes place in changing places in extreme architectures. The camera, which portrays them both and sets them in relation to the architecture, becomes a third partner. The camera repeatedly disengages from where they are and explores the surrounding streets and neighbourhoods before returning to the two protagonists. The shell constructions of the Uruguayan builder Eliado Dieste where they sojourn resemble gigantic braincases and thus provide a framework for the site and the theme of the project that emerges in the course of their talk: trauma and architecture.

From the synopsis of the project *Streetscapes*

In my films on the oeuvres of certain architects or on individual buildings, the landscapes we found them in and the streets, intersections, and cities in which they were built increasingly played a dominant role. We filmed on famous streets in well-known cities, on Route 66 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, on the Graben in Vienna, on Monroe Drive in Chicago, on the Via Appia south of Rome, on the Boulevard de l'ALN in Algiers, on the Place d'Iéna in Paris, on Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi and on many other streets without naming them. And we filmed on the side streets and dead ends of deserted backwaters like Boise City, Oklahoma and in megacities like Mexico City, without naming the streets. The buildings were important to us as condensations of reality, but our gazes always wandered to the ends of the streets or continued to intersections, ensembles of plants or landscapes that weren't directly relevant to the theme.

Sprawling and perforce anonymous design ensembles increasingly became my theme. I can no longer describe or depict the whole of our reality through reduction to an authorial architecture. Instead, it is becoming ever more necessary to describe an anonymous situation, all of whose details are furnished with the insignia of an authorship, but whose multipartite will to shape can be called almost tragic, considering the whole and its contexts. Amid this ensemble, the individual designer begins to feel like Sisyphus in the myth.

For our eyes, at any given time and in any given weather, the texture of the real appears as a continuum. The camera can shape this continuum in the individual shot with the intent to illuminate or to cloud over; it cannot subdivide it. The 'off-screen' of intentions and meanings will find its way into the field of vision, again and again. Not until editing does the time machine – film – leap into the next possible continuum, which keeps its surfaces just as closed as the previous picture. But the omissions that every editing or postproduction technical intervention produces mislead us into projecting a narration. Every edit between two shots and every picture-internal, animation-technical intervention is the core of a story that either continues plausibly or moves into improbability. But the connection that this pictorial language enters into with the language spoken in the film is a balance that must be found anew, an experiment, in each film.

The efforts of various companies to make all street views 'democratically' accessible by repeated filming and streaming of the earth's street networks – optionally mixed with historical photos, i.e., adding a certain 'deep time' – suffer, like many pictorial worlds in the Internet, from the fact that they are not designed. There is no shaping selection of a consciousness behind the camera (and there can be none in this 'encyclopaedic' project). Instead, the task of registering everything is delegated to a machine that records everything dispassionately and senselessly. And it carries out its task summarily in a rigid production framework: long shot, dolly shot, 360° pan and zoom options that lose themselves in pixels. Our filming trips are at the other end of the spectrum of filmic possibilities: their result should be thoroughly designed, deliberate pictures that reflect a consciousness and the presence of a human brain behind the camera. The justification for our project lies in this poetically concentrated looking, and not in any kind of 'encyclopaedic' ambition.

Heinz Emigholz

Silence must be heard

Streetscapes [Dialogue] is the film manifestation of a project that took place in Germany, but mainly in Israel, for three intensive, long, marathons of dialogue between two of the film's writers, Heinz Emigholz and me. We met to talk, attempting to remove an obstruction resulting in Heinz's silence, muting his artistic journey and darkening his life at the time. We met to work; not in a therapeutic encounter – though I am a psychologist and expert in trauma – but as two people willing to undertake a difficult journey for a desired end.

Streetscapes [Dialogue] is about giving and receiving a testimony of trauma. In fact, it all started when I invited Emigholz to the lecture I gave at a conference held at the Freie Universität Berlin on testimony. My topic was about the silence of traumatic witnesses, which is their testimony. We talked after that and Emigholz shared his situation with me. I thought we should meet to talk about his creative block and its origins. I felt then that Heinz needed to give a testimony and I should be witness to it. His silence must first be heard in order to turn his mutism into a path. He willingly accepted the idea. We started a few months later.

My role there and then was not as psychotherapist, but as a person who becomes a living witness for a testimony buried deep beneath memories. I insisted that it not resemble a therapy.

The long and intensive dialogues turned into a long continuous dialogue of a Buberian nature. It was a person-to-person talk as Martin Buber conceived it, where what happens between people ('das Zwischenmenschliche') becomes the medium through which meaningful mutuality, care and containment, and most importantly, attentive listening, became the transformative factor for growth. We could both witness how the post-traumatic testimony gradually became a post-traumatic growth. The idea of making a film out of those dialogues was the sign that heralded the removal of the block, allowing creativity to start flowing. Our acquaintance, it is important to add, did not start at the Berlin conference, but in our shared interest in architecture (though Emigholz's interest is in the cinematographic aspect of architecture and mine is in the relationship between trauma and architecture). Heinz's reputation for his long list of both documentary and feature films on architecture is in fact a testimony in and of itself. In *Streetscapes [Dialogue]*, Emigholz took architecture to portray the space between people and formed it into the third protagonist of the dialogue. This aspect, which was not present in the marathon encounters, was for us another indication of the return of the spoken.

Zohar Rubinstein



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Heinz Emigholz was born in 1948 in Achim, near Bremen. Since 1973, he has worked as a freelance filmmaker, artist, writer, cinematographer, producer, and journalist. In 1974, he began an encyclopaedic series of drawings, *Die Basis des Make-Up*, which was the subject of a major exhibition at Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof museum in 2007/08. In 1978, he founded his own production company, Pym Films. In 1984, he began a film series called *Photographie und jenseits/Photography and Beyond*. From 1993 to 2013, he held a professorship in experimental filmmaking at the Berlin University of the Arts, where he is a co-founder of the Institute for Time-Based Media and the university's art and media course. Since 2012 he has been a member of the Academy of Arts in Berlin. His publications include *Krieg der Augen, Kreuz der Sinne; Seit Freud gesagt hat, der Künstler heile seine Neurose selbst, heilen die Künstler ihre Neurosen selbst; Normalsatz – Siebzehn Filme* and *Das schwarze Schamquadrat* (all four published by Martin Schmitz); *Die Basis des Make-Up (I) und (II); Der Begnadete Meier; Kleine Enzyklopädie der Photographie; Die Basis des Make-Up (III)* and *Sense of Architecture*.

Films (selection)

1973: *Schenec-Tady I* (27 min., Berlinale Forum 1975). 1974: *Arrowplane* (24 min., Berlinale Forum 1974), *Tide* (33 min., Berlinale Forum 1976). 1976: *Hotel* (27 min., Berlinale Forum 1976). 1981: *Normalsatz* (105 min., Berlinale Forum 1982). 1985: *Die Basis des Make-Up* (85 min.). 1987: *Die Wiese der Sachen/The Meadow of Things* (87 min., Berlinale Panorama 1988). 1999: *Maillarts Brücken (Photographie und jenseits – Teil 3)/Maillart's Bridges* (24 min., Berlinale Forum 2001). 2003: *Goff in der Wüste (Photographie und jenseits – Teil 7)/Goff in the Desert* (110 min., Berlinale Forum 2003). 2005: *D'Annunzios Höhle (Photographie und jenseits – Teil 8)/D'Annunzio's Cave* (60 min., Berlinale Forum 2005). 2008: *Loos ornamental (Photographie und jenseits – Teil 13)* (72 min., Berlinale Forum 2008). 2012: *Parabeton – Pier Luigi Nervi und römischer Beton/Parabeton – Pier Luigi Nervi and Roman Concrete* (100 min., Berlinale Forum 2012), *Perret in Frankreich and Algerien/Perret in France and Algeria* (110 min.). 2014: *The Airstrip – Aufbruch der Moderne, Teil III/The Airstrip – Decampment of Modernism, Part III* (108 min., Berlinale Forum 2014). 2015: *Le Corbusier [IIII] Asger Jorn [Relief]* (29 min., Berlinale Forum Expanded 2016). 2017: *2+2=22 [The Alphabet], Bickels [Socialism], Streetscapes [Dialogue], Dieste [Uruguay]*.